

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES

Tuesday, August 13, 2013, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.,

Natural Resources Administrative Offices, 1800 S. County Road 31, Loveland, CO

The mission of the Larimer County Parks and Open Lands Department is to establish, protect, and manage significant regional parks and open lands, providing quality outdoor recreational opportunities and stewardship of natural resource values. We are committed to fostering a sense of community and appreciation for the natural and agricultural heritage of Larimer County for present and future generations.

PRESENT:

Parks Advisory Board members:

Steve Ambrose
Mark DeGregorio
Russ Fruits
John Gaffney
David Hattis
Frank Gillespie
Ron Kainer
Chris Klaas
Forest Orswell
Stephanie Sigler

Absent:

Rob Harris
Steve Johnson, Commissioner
Linda Knowlton
John Tipton

Staff:

Shannon Barnes
Gary Buffington
Sue Burke
Mark Caughlan
Chris Fleming
Dan Rieves

Public: NONE

The August 13, 2013, meeting of the Parks Advisory Board was called to order at 5:32 p.m. Minutes of the last meeting were approved.

Board photo for 2013 Annual Report – Sue Burke

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BOARD MEMBER REPORTS: NONE

PUBLIC COMMENT: NONE

GENERAL INFORMATION:

- Natural Resource Events for this month: See website <http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources>.
- To sign up for Parks Advisory Board minutes go to <http://larimer.org/subscriptions.cfm> put in your email and click 'subscribe', then check "Parks Advisory Board" box
- Orientation and tour of parks for new parks advisory board members: Thursday August 15, 2013 8am to 4:30pm. The areas visited on the tour will include: Carter Lake, Flatiron Reservoir, Pinewood Lake and Horsetooth Reservoir.

ACTION ITEMS:

Election of officers

This business normally occurs at the July meeting.

Board Chair: Russ Fruits was nominated by Forrest Orswell; seconded by Ron Kainer. Nomination was unanimously approved.

Vice-Chair: Rob Harris was nominated by Ron Kainer; John Gaffney seconded. Nomination was unanimously approved.

PRESENTATIONS: NONE

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Budget Information – Gary Buffington, Natural Resources Director – See attached report

Gary explained the department's budget and how it is broken down.

- The revenue budget for 2013 was put into place in September of 2012.
- Department of Natural Resources has four programs: Open Lands, Parks, Weed District and Forestry.
- We receive a small piece of the General Fund. The General Fund allocation to the Parks Fund will be further reduced in the next 3 years.
- The 2013 revenue budget for the entire department is 8 million dollars.
- Weed District and Forestry are combined and are under the Land Stewardship Program.
- 58% of the Weed District and Forestry money comes from Real Property Tax & Specific Ownership.
- The Forestry program has one full time employee.
- The total Revenue budget for Pest Control (Weeds) & Forestry is \$829,000.
- Open Space is funded 80% by the county's Open Space sales tax. In 2018 the tax is up for renewal.

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- Allowable use of the ¼ cent Open Space sales tax: 70% acquisition and development, 15% long term management, 15% is discretionary revenue, which may be used for either purpose.
- 59% of the Parks revenue budget comes from our park permits and camping fees.
- 5% of the Parks Fund revenue comes from the General Fund.
- Right now we have approximately 1 million dollars in the Parks Reserve Fund.
- 2012 was a tough year for the department due to: Fires, drought, low water levels, etc.
- We depend on our seasonal employees. They are a big part of our personnel budget and service to the public.

Board & staff comments:

Steve Ambrose: Is the sales tax up for renewal?

Gary Buffington: Yes in 2018.

Mark DeGregorio: When did the 15% discretionary revenue start covering the management of the Open Spaces?

Gary Buffington: Probably in the last 3 to 4 years.

Frank Gillespie: An 8 million dollar budget with 1 million in Parks Reserve sounds like a lot. Is it typical of other agencies?

Gary Buffington: A lot of things can happen that effect the revenue: Drought, wild fires, weather, fire bans etc. It is typical of other agencies. Providing the same level of service, a half million dollars would probably cover two bad years in a row.

Dan Rieves: Certainly the safety net is there. It allows us to be nimble and really take advantage of some opportunities quickly. The real pressure in the past five years has come from the weaning off of the General Fund. Another concern for the department is the competition for the other money. Title 28 money gets frozen. The lottery money is a concern. The rug could get pulled out from under us at any time.

Mark DeGregorio: You need that flexibility. If you take money from the reserve to match dollars for a project, do you set timelines for paying it back so the reserve remains somewhat stable?

Gary Buffington: We do have a loan out right now with Solid Waste. A few years ago we had a huge opportunity. The Bureau of Reclamation gave us 2.2 million dollars. We had to match the 2.2 million so we borrowed 1.2 million from the Solid Waste program. We also used some reserve and lottery money to match the 2.2 million dollars. We will be paying back the loan in 2014, 2015, and 2016.

Dan Rieves: There are stipulations for how we use the money from our different sources. Title 28 money can only be used at the reservoirs; lottery dollars can be used for capital projects. We can use the reserve money at our discretion. It has to used at the reservoirs because it was generated at the reservoir Parks. It gives us a lot of flexibility.

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Mark DeGregorio: I was surprised that your personnel cost percentage is as low as it is.

Gary Buffington: Comparing State Parks with Larimer County: Before the merger, they had 3 employees to our 1. I'm not sure where they stand now. Our managers are not only managers, they are rangers. They don't sit in an office, they are out in the parks working nights and weekends. We have 43 full time employees we should have more. We are probably 6 to 8 full time positions short compared to other agencies.

Russ Fruits: How much does a vault bathroom cost? \$200,000?

Gary Buffington: One bathroom cost \$48,000.

Frank Gillespie: Is the Conservation Trust subject to grants?

Gary Buffington: The amount the County gets from Conservation Trust is based on population. GOCO is the portion of Lottery funding distributed through grants.

Dan Rieves: Remember that is unincorporated Larimer county. All the municipalities get their shares as well.

Dan Rieves: If we do not get the GOCO grant for the renovation for Pinewood we will still do the renovation with money on hand.

Frank Gillespie: Do we have any backlash from visitors who buy an annual pass when we hit capacity?

Dan Rieves: Yes, we explain it is not an exclusive membership. You are pre-buying your day passes. It does not guarantee entrance to the park. If a visitor wants a guaranteed spot on the water they would need to buy a slip at the marina. The issue does come up, but not as often as you think.

Steve Ambrose: In 2007 - 2009 the department was in the red, where did you get the funds to cover that?

Gary Buffington: Our reserves.

Dan Rieves: No matter which District brings in the most revenue, it all goes into a pot. Historically, Horsetooth carries the load. Carter and Horsetooth make enough to subsidize Flatiron & Pinewood.

STANDING AGENDA ITEMS:

Park District updates and Parks Master Plan Implementation Progress report – Dan Rieves, Visitor Services Manager, Chris Fleming, Blue Mountain District Manager, and Mark Caughlan, Horsetooth District Manager

The fabulous Colorado weather is keeping us really busy. Active Network (our reservation company) is running a promotion with Cliff Bars. They sent us 5000 Cliff Bars to distribute at our discretion. We are handing them out at our events and to campers when they come to register for camping. There is room for growth with special events. We can expand some other opportunities through promotions with other vendors: REI, JAX, Perderson Toyota etc. We don't want to commercialize everything, but there are some opportunities. As we start to pursue these types of things we will need the Parks Advisory Board's feedback.

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Blue Mountain:

- Water levels are still really good. We haven't lost any ramps yet which is unheard of in August.
- Our FTO rangers are entering phase 3 of their training. They are doing really well.
- We are doing a survey for our pavilion renters to provide feedback. We would like to increase the bookings for the pavilions.
- South Shore campground has water again. A new well was installed.
- We are working with the Bureau of Reclamation to try to get Title 28 dollars for the Pinewood project.
- Boating accident: Jet ski ran into a boat. The driver of the jet ski was intoxicated. Luckily the injuries were very minor.
- Junior Sailing event. 25 kids participated. Great event and a good partnership with the Sail Club.
- Estes Park has been extremely busy. A lot of medical situations: Motorcycle accidents, suicide attempts etc.
- There is an increase in bear activity in Estes Park.
- Big Special Event at Mary's Lake: Sisters on the Fly and the Women's Fly Fishers national RV women's club. They will occupy 75% of the campsites at Mary's Lake.
- Wolf Wood program will be at Hermit Park all weekend. It is a fantastic program.

Horsetooth:

- Group Use areas are extremely busy this year. A lot of weddings at the park.
- Stand up paddle board race event with 60 participants.
- Stoke and Stride event is every Wednesday night at South Bay. We don't charge very much for the event, but they bring in about 40 to 50 spectators every Wednesday night.
- Two boat accidents since the last meeting. One boat sank and the other accident involved a 14 year old girl being run over by a boat. She severely cut her leg .
- Homeless man died at Lions Park.
- A man had a heart attack in the South Bay campground. Rangers did a fantastic job.
- East side at Horsetooth is really busy even during the week.
- Entrance road redesign at South Bay will begin in October.

Board and Staff Comments:

Frank Gillespie: Current special events include: Bike races, weddings, swimming events. What other types of events are we currently doing?

Dan Rieves: Fishing tournaments, sailing events, wake surfing events, etc. There are certain types of events we will not do: Medieval festivals, monster truck rallies etc.

David Hattis: How much time do the special events impact your staff?

Dan Rieves: There is a routing process. First the application goes to Diane. She will delegate the Special Event to the appropriate manager. If the event will impact several of our properties it will get routed to me.

David Hattis: Have you considered having a dedicated staff member do the special events, like an event coordinator?

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Dan Rieves: It is on the list. I would like to be more proactive and actually go and recruit events. We have done some recruiting, but that is where we really need an Event Coordinator position.

Chris Fleming: Special events are really time consuming. We only charge \$25 to submit an application. It is days, hours or weeks we spend helping these applicants coordinate an event. We are not making a whole lot of money from special events. So many of them are non-profit.

Gary Buffington: We only make about \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year from special events. Do we build that program and possibly displace regular recreation? We struggle with the concept of special events vs. regular visitor use of our Parks and Open Spaces.

Dan Rieves: I find myself always in the position to be the advocate of the average visitor who just shows up and has no idea the event is going on. We bend and twist and guide these events to be as low impact as possible.

John Gaffney: The skill set for the Special Event Coordinator is unique. It's almost like a advertizing/sales position with an event component to it. You see it a lot in private business.

Frank Gillespie: People who attend a wedding at Hermit Park and Horsetooth, do they have to buy pay an entry fee?

Mark Caughlan: Yes, they pay for the facility and they pay an entry fee as well.

Mark DeGregorio: What do you anticipate the impact from the US Pro Challenge to be on our Parks? What are you doing staffing wise?

Dan Rieves: We have sent out an e-blast to all of our customers who have reservations that weekend. We will be handing out flyers starting Thursday. We have 12 staff members committed to the race . Course wide from multiple agencies: Over 100 police officers, 856 volunteers etc.

Mark DeGregorio: Will people be able to get to their campsites on Friday night or Saturday?

Dan Rieves: The big closure will be the Big Thompson canyon. Regarding the Horsetooth area, the big closure will be on the east side of Horsetooth from Dixon dam to Horsetooth dam. That section will close Friday night until the race is over. If you are a camper or boater at South Bay you could be under lock down for about an hour.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Thank you for your questions and input. What else would you like to see for agenda items? Would anyone like to see something on concession management and operation? It would be a good opportunity to compare the Inlet Bay Marina and the Carter Lake Marina.

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Board & Staff Comments:

Mark DeGregorio: I would like an update on the Concessionaires. It's been a couple of years since we have had an update.

Frank Gillespie: I would be interested in hearing about the mitigation of the Pine Beetle. I would also like to hear about the events planner at the Ranch and get some clarification. I was under the impression it was a private company that does it. They are not County employees.

Dan Rieves: You have the Budweiser Event Center itself. It is operated by Global Spectrum. Then you have the concessions inside the Budweiser Event Center which is run by Ovations. They do the food and beverages. Everything else that happens on the property: Car shows, 4-H, County fair, gun shows, rodeos etc. is run by county staff.

Gary Buffington: Are there 2 or 3 event planners?

Dan Rieves: There are at least 2.

Russ Fruits: Keep in mind that we may cancel the September meeting if we don't have any pressing matters. We can address those topics at the October meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Barnes

APPROVED:

Russell Fruits, Chair

Next regular meeting: September 10, 2013, Larimer County Courthouse Office Building, Boyd Lake Room, 200 W. Oak Street, Ft. Collins, CO

Public can view agenda and minutes at www.larimer.org/parks
